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NFL DRAFT MIRRORS 2008 MWC FOOTBALL FINISH

We can now officially put to bed those wishful thoughts that BYU's losses to TCU and Utah in league play was just a result of poor coaching, lack of preparation or the team being too flat.

As Don James, the former and heralded coach of the Washington Huskies in their heyday, used to say, and as the recently completed NFL draft shouted, last season, the Frogs and Utes simply had superior manpower to the Cougars.

It showed on the scoreboard and in what NFL teams thought and acted upon in last week's draft.

When his team was a constant top 15 program, it was James who said that you needed 5-7 NFL prospects on your roster at all times if you expected to be a national player.

That doesn't mean that you have 5-7 guys drafted every year, but that you had 5-7 players on your team at all times that would eventually be drafted.

As we have said here at Cougar Sportsline for years, it is all about the players.

If you have them you will win. If you don't, you won't.

Of course there can be an occasional aberration to that theory, but in a majority of the cases, top players means top program.

Despite Utah's unbeaten season, we still maintain that TCU had the best team in the Mountain West Conference last season.

They dominated the Utes in Salt Lake City and except for a lack of a field goal kicker, and some untimely prevent defense, should have been king of the MWC hill.

In case you missed it, the Horned Frogs had 5 players taken in the most recent NFL draft.

Their best player from last season won't go until next year. That is when Jerry Hughes is projected to be a sure-fire first round pick.

Utah landed four players in the draft, including two second round picks.

BYU had two players selected in Austin Collie and Fui Vakapuna. Collie went in the fourth round to Indianapolis and Vakapuna in the seventh round to Cincinnati.

In case you forgot how the final football standings shook out for the 2008 MWC season, here they are with corresponding NFL draftees taken last week. It pretty much follows the theory of the more NFL prospects on a team, the higher they will be in the league standings.

Utah, 8-0, 13-0 (4) Paul Kruger-DL, 2nd round to Baltimore; Sean Smith-DB, 2nd round to Miami; Brice McCain, DB, 6th round to Houston; Freddie Brown-WR, 7th round to Cincinnati

TCU, 7-1, 11-2 (5) Jason Phillips-LB, 5th round to Baltimore; Aaron Brown-RB, 6th round to Detroit; Robert Henson-LB, 6th round to Washington; Stephen Hodge-DB, 6th round to Dallas; Blake Schlueter-OL, 7th round to Denver

BYU, 6-2, 10-3 (2) Austin Collie-WR, 4th round to Indy; Fui Vakapuna-FB, 7th round to Cincinnati

Air Force, 5-3, 8-5 (0)

Colorado State, 4-4, 7-6 (1) Gartrell Johnson-RB, 4th round to San Diego

UNLV, 2-6, 5-7 (1) Frank Summers-RB, 5th round to Pittsburgh

New Mexico, 2-6, 4-8 (2) Gover Quin-DB, 4th round to Houston; DeAndre Wright-DB, 6th round to New York Giants

Wyoming, 1-7, 4-8 (0)

San Diego State, 1-7, 2-10 (1) Lance Louis-OL, 7th round to Chicago

BYU's 2008 RECORD AGAINST TEAMS WITH EQUAL OR MORE NFL DRAFTEES

The Cougars lost three games last year. All three losses came from teams with more or equal NFL draftable talent. Those teams were TCU, Utah and Arizona. The Wildcats had two players taken in the draft last week.

Of BYU's ten wins, six came against teams that had no NFL draftees. That included Northern Iowa, Washington, UCLA, Wyoming, Utah State and Air Force.

Three more wins were manufactured against CSU, SDSU and UNLV. Each had one player taken.

BYU was lucky to beat New Mexico in Provo and the game was basically a push. Both the Cougars and Lobos had two players selected in the draft.

SO HOW DO YOU EXPLAIN BYU WINNING MWC CHAMPIONSHIPS AND GOING UNDEFEATED IN '06 AND '07?

It's simple.

The MWC had a dearth of NFL talent in those two seasons. In 2008, there were only 7 MWC players drafted. Bryan Kehl of BYU was one of those seven. In 2007, the league produced just nine draftees. John Beck was BYU's lone selection.

So what about next year and the NFL draft for BYU?

The Cougars should be able to keep their draft streak intact of at least one player selected in each of the last 15 years.

One and done should not just apply to BYU basketball next year.

In our opinion, Dennis Pitta will be the only BYU player that will get the call in the 2010 draft. Except for being a good blocker, he has what it takes to play at the next level as a tight end.

We don't expect any other player to be drafted from the Cougar roster next season.

We like Max Hall - as a college quarterback - but if Chase Daniel of Missouri and Graham Harrell of Texas Tech didn't get drafted this year, it doesn't bode well for Hall's chances next year. He just doesn't have the size and arm that the NFL is looking for.

Jan Jorgensen is a big motor guy at the college level, but again, in our opinion, he doesn't have the explosiveness and/or strength as a defensive lineman to be drafted.

DRAFT GLORY DAYS FOR BYU DEFENSIVE BACKS GONE

One thing we can absolutely guarantee is that no BYU defensive back will be drafted next year, the year after and after and after.

The BYU defensive back glory days are long gone. Even when they were in full bloom, there wasn't much glitter to the glory.

It has been 16 years since a BYU defensive back has heard his name called in the NFL draft.

That was Derwin Gray. He was selected in the 4th round by the Indianapolis Colts in 1993. Brian Mitchell was a 7th round selection in 1991. He went to Atlanta.

BYU had a draft run on db's in the late 80's. Rodney Rice went in the 8th round (in the days before the NFL decided to only go 7 rounds) to New England in 1989. Rodney Thomas went to Miami in the 5th round in 1988.

Jeff Sprowls was selected in the 12th round in 1986 by San Diego. Kyle Morrell was a 4th round pick by Minnesota in 1985.

Gray had a journeyman career for a few seasons with Indy, but the BYU defensive back with the best resume in the NFL is still Tom Holmoe. The current Cougar athletic director was picked by San Francisco in the 4th round in 1983.

BYU-OKLAHOMA WILL PUT THE DON JAMES THEORY TO THE TEST

We will find out in a hurry in September when BYU faces Oklahoma in Dallas if the Don James theory is valid.

Remember, it was James, the former UW coach, who said you needed at least 5-7 NFL caliber players on your roster at any given time to be a football factory.

With that in mind, here's a handicap of the Sooner-Cougar matchup.

Based on our observation of BYU, the Cougars will go into the game with a roster that will have just two solid NFL picks over the next few years. That would be Dennis Pitta and Matt Reynolds.

Again, we like Max Hall, Harvey Unga and all the other BYU headliners as good college players, but don't think they are likely to be drafted.

BYU may have a third or fourth NFL prospect a couple of years down the road in Bernard Afutiti and McKay Jacobson, but it will take a season before we can be sure. What Afutiti has that the big boys want is explosiveness and playmaking ability. Jacobson has speed and punt and kick returning abilities that could make him a more viable NFL option down the road.

It is unlikely that Oklahoma will replicate the 11 draft picks that USC posted this year, but early projections from those who follow the draft are that the Sooners will likely have at least 5 first-round selections in the 2010 draft.

That would include Sam Bradford, the Heisman trophy winner and a quarterback that many feel will be the first player taken next year.

Todd McShay of ESPN has already posted his mock draft for 2010 and he has Bradford as the No. 1 pick. He also projects four of the top seven selections in the draft to be Sooners and, as mentioned above, five first-rounders overall.

Besides Bradford, top-tier OU first-rounders for 2010 include Trent Williams, OL; Jermaine Gresham, TE and Gerald McCoy, a defensive tackle.

HOLD ON, THERE IS STILL HOPE

As good as TCU was last year, their early-season 35-10 loss to Oklahoma didn't dampen their season.

As a matter of fact, the Frogs finished ranked No. 7 in the nation, despite the shellacking delivered by OU.

We don't expect BYU to be a top ten team next year and despite the dearth of NFL prospects on the roster for next season, we expect the Cougars to have a good-to-great year, despite what happens against Oklahoma.

You have to put the upcoming season in the context of college and not the NFL.

BYU should have enough horses to compete for a MWC championship.

They will have a returning senior qb. That can't be overstated. Look to Utah for proof. They returned a senior qb, Brian Johnson, with a mediocre arm. That made him undraftable, but didn't keep him from being the MVP of his team. Take him away from the Utes last year and they don't go undefeated.

BYU will have a good college running back in Harvey Unga. They will get some more needed toughness with the return of Manase Tonga.

Dennis Pitta is special and McKay Jacobson will ease the loss of Austin Collie.

Offensive firepower will not be an issue for the Cougars next season.

The key will be, once again, on defense.

BYU may not get better personnel wise on defense, but they will catch a break in that the two teams that dominated them last year are losing lots of talent.

Defensively BYU may not be much better, but the good news is that Utah and TCU aren't likely to have the juggernauts they fielded last season. It also won't hurt that the Cougars get both teams in Provo, where Bronco Mendenhall and his teams have yet to lose a game.

It's hard to be optimistic with Oklahoma as the season opener, but beyond the Sooners, the sun should be shining brightly for the Cougars in 2009,

MORMON DEMOGRAPHICS AND DRAFT

According to the figures we have seen, Mormons make up approximately 1.9 percent of the population in the United States.

That demographic delineation was slightly higher in the most recently completed NFL draft.

Based on those draftees we have identified as LDS, there were 8 LDS college football players selected in the 2009 NFL draft.

With 256 players drafted, according to our calculator, that works out to be 3 percent of all draftees that are LDS.

Here they are:

Fili Moala, DL, USC...taken in 2nd round by Indianapolis

Paul Kruger, DL, Utah...taken in 2nd round by Baltimore

Kaluka Maiava, LB, USC...taken in 4th round by Cleveland

Austin Collie, WR, BYU...taken in 4th round by Indianapolis

Fenuki Tupou, OL, Oregon...taken in 5th round by Philadelphia

Al Afalava, DB, Oregon State...taken in 6th round by Chicago

J.D. Folsom, LB, Weber State...taken in 7th round by Miami

Fui Vakapuna, RB, BYU...taken in 7th round by Cincinnati

Four of the LDS draftees are returned missionaries. They include Kruger, Collie, Folsom and Vakapuna. They account for 1.5 percent of the most recent draft.

Speaking of Mormons and their penchant for genealogy, BYU football will now be able to trace a line directly to USC.

We have been told that Fili Moala will be marrying Jordan Anae later this month.

Anae and her sister are currently on the USC women's water polo team.

She is also the niece of current BYU offensive coordinator, Robert Anae.

BYU BASKETBALL ADDS ANOTHER PLAYER

Dave Rose has added another player to his BYU basketball roster.

The Cougars will sign Logan Magnusson, a 6-6 forward from Salt Lake Community College.

The Bruins are coming off a NJCAA National Championship of which, Magnusson was a big factor.

Magnusson prepped at 3-A Wasatch HS in Heber, UT, signed with Dixie State out of high school and then transferred to SLCC after serving an LDS mission.

Magnusson started 31-of-34 games for the Bruins. He averaged 8.3 points per game, had 5.6 rebounds per outing and 3.5 assists per game.

He shot .530 from the field and was .464 from beyond the arc. He also shot .794 from the line.

We saw a lot of Magnusson in high school where he was coached by his dad and teammates with Darin Mahoney, a player that BYU followed heavily in high school, but decided to pass on. He is now at Weber State.

Magnusson doesn't have great talent, but he grinds on you and will give the Cougars some toughness.

Think Jake Shoff of a few season back, only 40 pounds lighter. Another comparable would be Brock Reichner. He was short on talent, but had lots of "want to".

With the addition of Magnusson, the Cougars now have four players in the 6-5 range. That includes Jonathan Tavernari, Charles Abouo, Tyler Haws and walkon Brock Zylstra, who will be returning from an LDS mission.

FLUFF AND STUFF

The BYU's women volleyball program did not have a banner year last season under new coach Shay Golding. It looks like she will be getting some help next season with the addition of Mike Wilton as an assistant coach. That is according to a slew of stories from the Honolulu newspapers recently.

Wilton just retired as the head coach of the Hawaii men's program where he notched a national title on his belt. He coached 17 years with the Warriors.

He also was the head coach for the women's team at Cal Poly-SLO for 12 years. He also coached the Cal Poly men's team for three years and one year at Church College of Hawaii, now known as BYU-Hawaii.

John Beck was released by the Miami Dolphins last week. Beck, who was drafted in the second round two years ago by the Dolphins, was not in the quarterback plans of Miami and Bill Parcell, especially after they drafted Pat White last week. White is the running qb from West Virginia.

Beck started four games as a rookie in 2007, but did not see any action last season under new coach and Parcell appointee, Tony Sparano.

It will be interesting to see where, if at all, Beck is able to connect and sign a new contract.

BYU had just two players selected in the NFL draft last week, but had five other players sign as free agents.

David Nixon signed with Oakland, Ray Feinga and David Oswald signed with St. Louis, Travis Bright signed with Dallas and Dallas Reynolds inked with Philadelphia.